

Thwarted Johnson struck first to avoid being Brexit fall guy

Francis Elliott Political Editor

Theresa May had left No10 and arrived in her Maidenhead constituency when one of her political team called her away to take an urgent call early on Friday evening.

She had had a draining day overseeing the manhunt for the Parsons Green bomber and was due to announce that the national terrorism threat level was being raised.

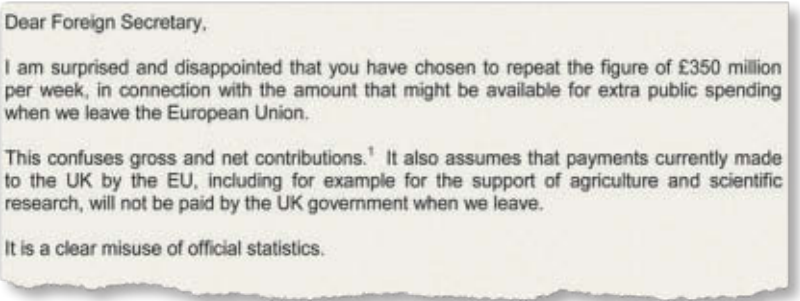
The prime minister listened in silence as she was told that Boris Johnson's office had just emailed a 4,200-word article setting out his vision for Brexit. It was due to be published on *The Daily Telegraph's* website within the next few hours, she was told.

In fact she already knew. Mr Johnson had spoken to her earlier in the day to alert her to what he was about to do. The foreign secretary had considered pulling the article when he saw the news about Britain's fifth terrorist attack of the year but decided to push ahead as it became obvious that there had been no fatalities. He called Mrs May to explain himself.

"It was a fait accompli," one figure involved said. "There was no attempt to get him to pull it and no offer from him to compromise on contents." The next day Mrs May and her team had to decide how best to respond to his deliberate challenge to her authority, days before her own speech in Florence on Friday. She had two choices: to sack him or to insist, that although his intervention was regrettable, there was no substantial breach of cabinet collective responsibility.

Damian Green, the de-facto deputy prime minister, Robbie Gibb, Mrs May's new director of communications, and Gavin Barwell, her chief of staff, are all likely to have been consulted about what to do. In fact Mr Gibb thought that he had headed off the danger after Mr Johnson agreed to pull a speech on Brexit when it became obvious that it would overshadow the second reading of the EU (Withdrawal) Bill this month.

A deal to delay until after Mrs May's own address came apart when Mr



Sir David Norgrove, chairman of the UK Statistics Authority, rejected the claim by Boris Johnson that leaving the EU would free up £350 million a week for Britain

Johnson found that there had been an informal meeting of cabinet ministers to discuss its contents on Thursday while he was on a visit to the Caribbean after Hurricane Irma.

Alarmed that he was being cut out of the key conversations, he demanded reassurance from Downing Street that Mrs May was not about to "sell the pass" on the Brexit "divorce bill". When No 10 refused to rule out a lengthy and expensive transition from the bloc, Mr Johnson reached for the draft of his undelivered speech and phoned his former employers at *The Daily Telegraph*.

When challenged on Saturday by Tory MPs, Mr Johnson protested injured innocence. He had simply wanted to be "sunny" about Brexit, he said. To calm nerves he agreed to send a supportive tweet: "Looking forward to PM's Florence speech. All behind Theresa for a glorious Brexit."

Few in Westminster are fooled by the insouciant tone adopted by either side. The stakes are too high. "Boris is f**ed," a minister said. "He's not coming back from this — and perhaps that's the point, he doesn't really want to."

It has been an open secret in Whitehall that Mr Johnson was becoming discontented by the limits of his role in the Foreign Office. He was briefly enthused by Donald Trump and believed he had found a role as an interlocutor with an administration that shared his anarchic spirit and enthusiasm for Brexit.

President Trump's response to clashes

in Charlottesville, Virginia, between white supremacists and counter-protesters forced a final painful reassessment. The departure from the White House of Steve Bannon, with whom he had forged a good working relationship, closed down a key route into the heart of the administration.

Mr Johnson's frustration with Brexit continued to grow, meanwhile, along with questions over his utility as foreign secretary at a time when the key foreign policy questions were being determined in No 10.

He has become increasingly sensitive to the claim that he wilfully misled voters over Britain's EU budget contribution and what additional sums might be available to public services after Brexit. Early in Mrs May's government the foreign secretary raised the issue, saying that voters had been promised more cash for the NHS. "That was your promise, Boris," Philip Hammond, the chancellor, shot back, "Not ours."

Now with the prospect of a "divorce bill" settling in the region of £30 billion to £40 billion, Mr Johnson fears that he is in line to take the brunt of any backlash from Leave voters who might feel betrayed by the reality that public services will not experience any Brexit uplift until 2022 at the earliest.

Mr Johnson has made clear that he is not willing to be party to a betrayal.

Clare Foges, page 18 Letters, page 20



Boris Johnson at the weekend. Theresa May, leaving church in Maidenhead with



her husband, Philip, conferred with aides over the foreign secretary's article. Amber Rudd appeared on The Andrew Marr Show

May will address the young and struggling

Francis Elliott

The prime minister is to repeat the key themes of her first conference as leader when she addresses the Conservative Party faithful next month.

Political aides have been told that the slogan for the party conference in Manchester, which begins on October 1, will again be "A country that works for everyone".

The party leadership wants to use the gathering to counteract Labour claims that the Tories have abandoned younger voters and those struggling to make ends meet at a time of stagnating living standards.

Theresa May will also return to the themes of tackling racial prejudice and improving mental health provision as she seeks to prove that she has an agenda beyond brokering a Brexit agreement.

The publication of a report into this year's election campaign at a meeting of the party's voluntary wing a day before the full conference is intended to draw the heat from grassroots' fury at its failure on June 8.

A panel including Sir Eric Pickles and Sir Patrick McLoughlin, current and former party chairmen; Graham Brady, chairman of the 1922 committee of backbenchers; Nus Ghani, MP for Wealden; and Robert Semple, chairman of the National Convention, the party's voluntary wing, will spend this week finalising its contents.

The panel has been taking evidence from key figures in the campaign including Sir Lynton Crosby, the Australian election strategist, and Lord Gilbert of Panteg, who was campaign director.

The *Sunday Times* suggested that it would be those who prepared the party's manifesto and its controversial pledge to increase liability for social care costs who would be criticised.

It quoted a source familiar with the report as saying: "We had a manifesto that only three people had input into. We need a process in future that protects against that. In any campaign the question of who is in charge should be clear. That was a problem this time around."

The work of Jim Messina, the US consultant who helped to target campaign resources, is also said to be in line for criticism. "We sent our rather ragged divisions to the wrong places because we were not picking up intelligence," a source told the newspaper.

Others, however, queried the extent to which the report would go into detailed analysis. "It's going to be long on recommendations and rather shorter on the sort of analysis that can be written up by you lot [in the media]," a well-informed figure said.

Another closely involved source said: "The trouble with these reviews is that you can hardly be completely candid while the leader responsible is still there."

Theresa May will hold talks today with Justin Trudeau, the prime minister of Canada, to try to head off a trade dispute threatening thousands of British jobs. The Canadian aerospace manufacturer Bombardier has been accused by its American rival Boeing of receiving unfair state support, including a £13million loan from the British government, for its new C-series plane.

Mrs May will also meet the head of Bombardier before a key US trade ruling on the dispute that, if it goes against the company, could cost 4,500 jobs at the company's factory in Belfast. She will invoke the countries' shared history, including Canada's contribution to the Battle of Britain, as she flies to Ottawa to start preliminary

talks on a post-Brexit trade deal. The two leaders are expected to agree that the EU-Canada trade agreement has the potential to boost transatlantic prosperity and could form the basis of a new bilateral arrangement between the Britain and Canada after Brexit.

The UK is the second biggest destination for Canadian investment abroad, after the United States. Britain's bilateral trade relationship is worth £15.2 billion annually to both economies, with £1.75 billion worth of Canadian money having been invested in the UK since March.

Mrs May said: "My visit to Canada today is not only about recognising our past but also looking ahead to our bright future. We are both countries with ambitions to lead on the world stage."

Less than one in four back Lib Dems

Matt Chorley Red Box Editor

Fewer than a quarter of voters would think about backing the Liberal Democrats at the next election, a poll shows despite Sir Vince Cable insisting that he could become prime minister.

In a blow for the pro-European party, even half of those described as "Hard Remainers", who want to reverse Brexit, say they could not vote Lib Dem.

Sir Vince yesterday claimed that his party "could break through" and form a Commons majority with him installed in No 10.

"I think it's perfectly plausible, actually," he told BBC One's *Andrew Marr Show*. "As leader of the third UK party, my job is to be the alternative prime minister."

A new YouGov survey seen by *The Times* shows the scale of the challenge the third party faces. More than a third

of voters (35 per cent) say they could never vote for them, while another quarter say they might in the future but not at the next election. Just 4 per cent say they will "definitely" support them, with 19 per cent "considering it".

More than half say they do not know what the Lib Dems stand for. One in five have not forgiven the party for going into coalition with the Tories, including more than one in three Labour voters and one in 10 Lib Dems.

While Remain secured 48 per cent of votes in the EU referendum, a sharp shift in attitudes shows just 27 per cent of people want Brexit to be reversed to keep the UK in the EU. Of these "Hard Remainers", barely a third would think about backing the Lib Dems.

At the party's annual conference in Bournemouth yesterday delegates clashed over the policy on Brexit, with some demanding that last year's vote be

overturned without a second referendum. Alistair Carmichael, a former Scottish secretary in the coalition government, claimed the Brexit vote was "as much as anything else a vote against the 21st century".

Sir Vince insisted that there should be another referendum once it is clear "what Brexit actually means", adding: "Give the people the choice about that, and exit from Brexit has got to be the option that remains."

His pitch to present himself as an alternative premier is undermined by polling which shows that of the half of voters that have a view about him, most think he is indecisive, untrustworthy and weak but likeable.

Today the party will again argue against Brexit, releasing figures showing that UK security services have made more than 60,000 requests to an EU criminal records database.

RED BOX
AT CONFERENCE

MATT CHORLEY

In the swim

Lib Dems taking an early dip in the pool of the main conference hotel, the Marriott, were shocked to find a foreign object floating in the water: Conor Burns, the local Tory.

A close shave

With rain forecast, sandals are not expected on the Bournemouth seafront. Now the other Lib Dem fashion is also in jeopardy. The Beard Liberation Front warns that the lack of whiskers "reflects a crisis in the traditional party of beard wearers". They will blame Tory cuts.

Bourne to rule

Bored journalists were invited to enjoy drinks and nibbles with the Lib Dem top brass last night in an attempt to ensure marginally less bad coverage. It was held in the Bourne Lounge, one of the less good films in the Matt Damon series.

Get knocked down

Jo Swinson, deputy leader, likened the Lib Dems to Chumbawamba because they "get knocked down, but they get up again". Formed in the 1980s, big in the 1990s, before seeing their popularity fall after 30 years of being "snotty, eclectic, funny, contrary and just plain weird", Chumbawamba split up in 2012.

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Sir Vince, the man all parish councillors want to be

Patrick Kidd Political Sketch

You must always expect the unexpected with Boris Johnson. Even so, it was a surprise to see him on the Bournemouth seafront yesterday lunchtime, outside the Liberal Democrat conference, waving an EU flag and singing about how he is going to cancel Brexit.

It was an impersonator, but quite a good one. Blond mane, Falstaffian belly, all gollies and cripes. He should stay away from Westminster lest Michael Gove use him as a pincushion. "Now I'm the king of the jungle, the foreign secretary," he sang, imitating King Louie in *The*

Jungle Book. "You'll see it's true-oo-oo that a fake like me-hee-hee could talk our way back into the EU."

Never let it be said that the Lib Dems aren't serious. Pseudo-Boris had led a few dozen Eurofanatics on a march and was now serenading them beside the pier while waving a puppet Theresa May. His fans held EU flags, wore berets and badges saying things like "bollox to Brexit" and chanted "Only the rich want Brexit", which slightly ignored the polling data. Someone was wearing a Kate Middleton mask. Another had a Dorset flag — an independent Dorset in a united Europe! All charmingly loopy. All very Lib Dem.

I left Boris on the seafront, now performing a version of Miley Cyrus's *Wrecking Ball* — "all I wanted was to break Dave's balls" —

and returned to the conference where Sir Vince Cable was taking questions from members. Outside the auditorium a sign warned that "smoke, pyrotechnics, strobe lighting and lasers" may feature. Alas, a broken promise. No smoke, nor even all that much hot air. It was a sleepy session.

The first questioner was Doreen from Newcastle, who wondered what the new leader would do about airport

"Boris" and his Theresa May puppet in Dorset



expansion. Another member then recalled a joyous afternoon when Sir Vince had come to their garden party in Hounslow and they hadn't heard a word he said because of the aircraft. Then, going from planes to trains, Sir Vince told them that HS2 would "convert Birmingham into a new Croydon". I don't think this was a good thing.

After that he ran through his views on rates, inequality, Brexit and how campaigning on the subject of Swansea Bay plays well in south Wales but not in Newcastle. A wise man. Sir Vince ended by telling them that he is

not the mild undertaker he appears to be. "I love danger," he said. "The one thing I miss most from being in the cabinet is the adrenaline rush I got from visiting car companies and being allowed to drive their fastest cars." Chairing a Lib Dem sub-committee on wind power just doesn't match up to taking an Aston Martin DB9 for a spin at 150mph.

He is a demon on skis too. The Lib Dem answer to James Bond — a man whom all parish councillors want to be and all accountants want between their balance sheets — took up skiing at 63 and is addicted. "I've done the red runs, but I want to try a black run," he said, to gasps from those who dread a new leadership contest. Having reached the summit at 74, it is all downhill from here for Sir Vince, one way or another.